

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claim 1 - 4. (canceled)

5. (currently amended): A method for producing fermented milk, which comprises reducing the concentration of dissolved oxygen in a mixture comprising milk ~~mix of raw materials for fermented milk~~ at the start of fermentation to 5 ppm or less by substituting the dissolved oxygen with an inert gas selected from the group of nitrogen, argon, or helium gas; and carrying out fermentation at a fermentation temperature of from 30°C to 37°C.

6. (previously presented): The method for producing fermented milk according to claim 5, wherein the period of carrying out fermentation is shorter than a period of carrying out fermentation without reducing the concentration of dissolved oxygen at the fermentation temperature.

7. (canceled)

8. (previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 5.

9. (previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 6.

10. (previously presented): A fermented milk, which has a penetration angle of 31° or less and a hardness of 40 g or more, wherein the hardness is an elasticity until break of the penetration angle curve obtained by a measurement of the penetration angle of a yogurt knife with a weight of 100 g using a neocurd meter, and the penetration angle is an indicator of smoothness.

11. (previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 5, which has a penetration angle of 31° or less and a hardness of 40 g or more, wherein the hardness is an elasticity until break of the penetration angle curve obtained by a measurement of the penetration angle of a yogurt knife with a weight of 100 g using a neocurd meter, and the penetration angle is an indicator of smoothness.

12. (previously presented): The fermented milk produced by the method according to claim 6, which has a penetration angle of 31° or less and a hardness of 40 g or more, wherein the hardness is an elasticity until break of the penetration angle curve obtained by a measurement of the penetration angle of a yogurt knife with a weight of 100 g using a neocurd meter, and the penetration angle is an indicator of smoothness.

13. (canceled).

14. (new): The method for producing fermented milk according to claim 5, wherein the inert gas is nitrogen.

15. (new): The method for producing fermented milk according to claim 5, further comprising subjecting the mixture to sterilization, prior to the step of reducing the concentration of dissolved oxygen in the mixture,

wherein the sterilization, reducing the concentration of dissolved oxygen, and fermentation are carried out in this order.